



SALEM TO SUSPEND CAMP D.A.R.E.

BUDGET CONCERNS PROMPT CUT

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One of the more popular programs in Salem has become a victim of the current economic times and budget woes that are facing the city. Camp D.A.R.E. – the free, summer-long, overnight camp for rising 7th graders at Andrew Lewis Middle School – has been dropped indefinitely in a move that will save the city more than \$100,000 annually.

“It’s extremely unfortunate that Camp D.A.R.E. is one of the programs we have to suspend,” says Salem City Manager Kevin Boggess. “For 19-years this has been a summer staple for many of the school kids in Salem, but I think this shows just how serious things are right now.”

Salem was one of the original 13 jurisdictions included in Virginia’s Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) efforts back in 1986. Camp D.A.R.E. was founded in 1991 as an extension of this program and yet another way for Salem to show its support for its young people. Salem’s Camp D.A.R.E. worked to do more than just help kids say no to drugs. Life skills were taught daily by the officers as they stressed the importance of having good communications skills along with a positive self-image

Camp D.A.R.E. stretched out over eight weeks of the summer and was held at Camp Bethel in the Nace community of Botetourt County. Salem Police officers transported children to the camp on Mondays and then brought them back home on Fridays. Three to four officers along with a number of counselors stayed at the camp all week with the students, and they were joined by members of the Salem Fire and Rescue, Salem Parks and Recreation personnel, as well as additional members of the Salem Police Department on days when canoe trips, rescue lessons or activities on the ropes course were scheduled.

“Having been one of the Camp’s directors, I’m extremely disappointed that we have to take this action,” says Salem Police Chief Jeff Dudley. “But the camp consumes a lot of man hours during the summer months and during these tight times with hiring freezes in effect citywide, it just makes more sense to use these resources in other ways.”

Last year, 320 rising 7th graders were eligible to attend Salem’s Camp D.A.R.E. and 208 took advantage of the opportunity. Operating the camp for those 208 students cost the city more than \$100,000 by the time lodging, meals, transportation, equipment and staffing bills were paid.

“This is a significant amount of money and in a day and age where Salem is preparing to start a second year of pay and hiring freezes coupled with declining revenues, sacrifices like these are unfortunate, but necessary,” says Boggess.

While the summer camp is being suspended indefinitely, the D.A.R.E. program will continue to be a vital part in each of Salem’s 6 schools.

“The presence of our officers in the schools will continue just as it has in the past, because we know from experience that they have a very positive influence on our city’s school children,” says Dudley.

Salem Camp D.A.R.E began on June 17, 1991. Since its inception, 3,761 middle school students have attended one of the summer sessions.

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